**Writing Assignment 3: The Cause-and-Effect Paper**

**Causal Arguments**

As we’ve seen in our discussion of the cause-and-effect paper, human beings are creatures in search of *significance*, and part of that search for significance and meaning is the quest to assign causes to observed effects. One commentator has said that science is the “search for causes.” Science is also the search for *predictable effects*—but so, too, is every discipline: each area of study has field-specific concerns for what causes what. In rhetoric and composition, for example, people are concerned with finding what causes student writers to be successful, and what effects certain arguments may be expected to have on given audiences.

**Assignment Specifications**

For this paper, 5 pages in length and in MLA format, you have a couple major avenues to choose from. You could look at some *effect(s)* of your choosing and making an argument for what factor(s) (arguably) caused it. While this may be a matter of some personal concern and interest to you, the point is **not** to make this a “personal essay” with frequent reference to yourself and the details of your life. Instead, take on something with broader social significance. You may, for example, discuss the causes leading to a certain disciplinary measure at school, the prestige accorded an extracurricular activity (e.g., a sport, academic decathlon), or the causes for argumentative behavior among students. In other words, the purpose of this mode is to *explain*.

Or, you could choose one or more *causes* and demonstrate by argument what effects they could or will likely have. (Note the difference in strength between “could” and “will.”) You might focus on what effects the adoption of some disciplinary will have or continue to have if adopted or maintained, what will happen if certain curricula are adopted (e.g., what if Texas history textbooks offer a distorted view of history?), or what may follow if enrollment in dual credit courses increases. In other words, the purpose of this mode is to *predict*.

These topics are merely suggestions. There are numerous possibilities you may choose from. In each and every case, *be sure to weigh the merits (i.e., the strength) of arguments for alternate explanations or predictions*.

AUDIENCE: For this paper, assume an audience somewhat unfamiliar with the subject matter, so provide relevant background information.

ORGANIZATION: As usual, this paper will have three basic parts: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The introduction will set up the relevance for your causal claim, the body will contain the substance of your argument, and the conclusion will cinch off the discussion with some kind of summing-up thought and perhaps a memorable final remark.

TONE/STYLE: Consider this writing situation to be a formal one, so write for a well informed, educated audience expecting civil discussion. While your paper in assigning cause may also assign *blame*, keep your remarks respectful. Because you wish to be engaging as well as to make your point, varying sentence structure (which often happens “naturally” without being stipulated as a requirement) is a good idea.

DUE DATE: This paper is due in my inbox at [barnes.english@gmail.com](mailto:barnes.english@gmail.com) on **March 22**, by 7:00pm. To make things easy for me to organize, submit your document as a Microsoft Word document saved as **WA2YourLastName.docx**. No late work will be accepted.